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President Andrew Johnson honored in ceremonies

GREENEVILLE, Tn - Brig. Gen. David E. Greer, Tennessee's Assistant Adjutant General, described President Andrew Johnson as "an honest and honorable man," during ceremonies in Greeneville last week commemorating the 198th anniversary of the birth of the 17th President of the United States.

The memorial ceremony was established in 1967 as part of a program by the White House to honor all former presidents on the anniversary of their birth dates. This year's ceremony was held Dec. 29 on Monument Hill at Greeneville's Andrew Johnson National Historic Site. Gen. Greer, representing President George W. Bush, laid a memorial wreath at the Johnson gravesite.

He called the period of Johnson's presidency one of the most turbulent times ever experienced by the nation. "Andrew Johnson's life and career showed him to be a man of great courage and integrity," Greer said. "He remained unwavering in his beliefs regardless of the personal cost to himself."

The Tennessee Army National Guard Funeral Honors Team rendered a 21-gun salute. The team bugler, assisted by a second bugler from Veterans of Foreign Wars post 1990, played "Taps" as Greer and soldiers of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment laid the wreath at Johnson's grave. A prayer was delivered by Cookeville's Captain Mark Phillips, of 3rd Squadron, 278th ACR.

Tennessee Guardsmen also participating in the ceremony were Col. Franklin C. McCauley, Jr., Deputy Commander of the 278th, and over 20 soldiers from the 278th's 3rd Squadron.

VFW Post 1990 volunteers from Greeneville provided the Color Guard.

President Andrew Johnson, born on December 29, 1808, was president from 1865 to 1869, ascending to the presidency upon the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He was the first president to be impeached, but was later acquitted by a single vote in the senate. Johnson would be the first ex-president to serve in the senate after his presidency, serving there until his death in 1875 at Elizabethton, Tennessee.

The Johnson burial site, originally called Signal Hill, was an area used during the Civil War for signaling because of its vast view of the surrounding mountains. Johnson's body was wrapped in an American flag with his head resting on a copy of the Constitution, the document he defended throughout his lifetime. Earlier he had written, "When I die, I want no more winding sheet than that of the brave old flag ... and no softer pillow than the Constitution of my country."

According to family tradition, Johnson enjoyed coming to this particular spot on Signal Mountain "for peace and meditation." It afforded a superb and unpopulated view of the mountains in the distance, and is known today as Monument Hill.

***By Capt. Darrin Haas, Command Historian
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Photo # 1

Brig. Gen. David Greer, Tennessee Assistant Adjutant General, and Col. Franklin C. McCauley, Jr., Deputy Commander of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, at the Dec. 29 wreath-laying ceremony.

Photo #2

The Tennessee Army National Guard's Funeral Honors Team renders a 21-gun salute.

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